

BC VEGETABLE MARKETING COMMISSION

September 23, 2002

Ronald L. Cioffi, Chief
Marketing Order Administration Branch, Headquarters
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Stop Code 0237, Room 2525-S
Washington, DC
20250-0237

Dear Mr. Cioffi:

Recently the Florida Tomato Committee (FTC), which consists of 12 members appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, requested a change to the Florida Tomato Marketing Order. The requested change by the FTC, if accepted by the Secretary, will have a profound impact on the ability to export greenhouse grown tomatoes from Canada into the United States.

The existing Florida Tomato Marketing "Order" regulates minimum grade and minimum size standards for field tomatoes produced in the State of Florida. The Order is seasonal and is in place from October to June 10th annually. During this period all tomatoes exported into the United States must meet the minimum grade and size standards defined within the Order. As greenhouse-grown tomatoes are currently exempt from the Order, this has not been an issue for Canadian exports in the past.

The Florida Tomato Committee has now requested that greenhouse tomatoes no longer be exempt from the Florida Tomato Marketing Order, which would require that all tomatoes exported into the United States must meet this minimum grade and size standard. Greenhouse grown tomatoes are superior in quality to field grown tomatoes and normally would not have any difficulty in meeting minimum grade and size requirements within the existing Order. The problem arises with the lack of recognition of the different types of tomatoes produced. The Florida Order specifies that the minimum size and grade standards be applied to all round tomatoes and does not differentiate between the various tomato types that are prevalent in the market today.

Within Canada we produce about 50% Beefsteak tomatoes, and the other 50% are Tomatoes-on-the-Vine. Tomatoes-on-the-Vine have grown in market share from 10% of the volume produced just 5 years ago, to now more than 50% of the current production capacity of Canadian greenhouses producing tomatoes in Canada. Tomatoes-on-the-Vine come in a variety of different sizes, ranging from the cocktail varieties (such as Cherry tomatoes and Grape tomatoes) to the larger tomato varieties (like Tradiro); while the greenhouse grown Tomatoes-on-the-Vine would have no difficulty making the minimum grade requirement, the size requirement is another issue altogether.

Tomatoes-on-the-Vine are smaller in nature than Beefsteak grown tomatoes. The different varieties range in size and consumers purchase them depending upon their end use. This is the fastest growing sector of tomato production in Canada and North America. The attempt by the Florida Tomato Committee to require all tomatoes, whether Beefsteak or Tomatoes-on-the-Vine, to meet the minimum size requirements of 2-9/32" for all round tomatoes, is a blatant attempt to restrict the importation of Tomatoes-on-the-Vine into the United States. This is nothing more than a backdoor attempt to establish a non-tariff barrier by a U.S. agricultural interest and is out of touch with the modern marketplace and consumer demand.

We have already raised this issue with the Canadian government and representatives from the Florida tomato industry, and we will raise it again at the next meeting of the North American Tomato Trade Working Group to be held in New Orleans on October 12th. We will do everything we can to exert pressure on the Florida industry to withdraw this request for the change in their Order and we encourage the U. S. Department of Agriculture to reject the request of the Florida Tomato Committee before serious economic damage can be wrought on the Canadian greenhouse tomato industry, the interests of the US distributive trade and the US consumer. Please contact me for further information at 6004-940-0188 or by email murray@bcveg.com.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Driediger', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Murray Driediger
General Manager
BC VEGETABLE MARKETING COMMISSION

CC: Hon. Lyle Van Clief, Minister AAFC
Hon. John Van Dongen, Minister BCMAF
Ron Krystynak, Agriculture Counsellor, Canadian Embassy, Wash. DC
Denton Hoffman, OGVGMB
Bryant Fairley, BCMAF
David Smith, BC Hot House Foods Inc.
Vern Toews, Global Greenhouse Produce Inc.
All BC greenhouse tomato producers